UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
LIMITED

E/ICEF/1998/P/L.3
14 November 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
First regular session 1998
26-28 and 30 January 1998
Item 9 of the provisional agenda*

FOR INFORMATION

SUMMARY OF MID-TERM REVIEWS AND MAJOR EVALUATIONS OF COUNTRY PROGRAMMES

Americas and the Caribbean region

SUMMARY

The present report was prepared in response to Executive Board decision 1995/8 (E/ICEF/1995/9/Rev.1), which requested the secretariat to submit to the Board a summary of the outcome of mid-term reviews and major country programme evaluations, specifying, inter alia, the results achieved, lessons learned and the need for any adjustment in the country programme. The Board is to comment on the reports and provide guidance to the secretariat, if necessary. The mid-term reviews and evaluations described in the present report were conducted during 1997.

INTRODUCTION

1. In 1997, several thematic evaluations and three mid-term reviews (MTRs) were carried out in the Americas and the Caribbean region, the latter in Brazil, Guyana and Paraguay. The Brazil MTR, which comes in the fourth year of a seven-year programme cycle, was held too late to be included in the present report and will be reported on to the Executive Board in 1999.

2. The year 1997 was a milestone in developing thematic evaluation practices in the region. The Americas and Caribbean Regional Office (TACRO) initiated a participatory process for the preparation of a regional framework and plan of action for monitoring and evaluation activities, which was adopted in May during a regional workshop held in Santa Fé de Bogotá, Colombia.

* E/ICEF/1998/2.

3. The present report summarizes recent evaluations of UNICEF-assisted programmes and activities that represent: (a) regional priorities, such as the children's election in Mexico and programme and project evaluations supporting the MTR in Brazil; (b) relevance of findings and lessons learned, e.g., Andean basic services against poverty (under the Andean subregional programme (Programa para la region Andina (PROANDES))) in Bolivia; and (c) efficient use of best practices and lessons learned to improve strategic planning as a basis for future programming, such as the integrated basic services programme (Programa de servicios basicos integrados (PROSERBI)) in Nicaragua. These evaluations were carried out by external agencies: the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) for the PROSERBI and PROANDES evaluations; a private company which conducted an opinion poll for the children's elections in Mexico; and external consultants for the programme and project evaluations in Brazil.

COUNTRY MID-TERM REVIEWS

Paraguay

4. The MTR provided an opportunity for advocacy to reorient the country programme towards a rights-based conceptual framework and strategy. The process was participatory in nature, and built bridges at all levels between government institutions and civil society. United Nations agencies, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) participated in the review. In addition, further collaboration on a Common Country Assessment and United Nations Development Assistance Framework are planned in preparation for the next programme cycle.

5. The situation of children and women. Paraguay is characterized by extreme disparities in income distribution and social indicators. There are striking socio-economic, gender, ethnic and cultural inequalities within the country. Average figures hide three- to four-fold fluctuations between the most and the least privileged population groups. However, the infant mortality rate (IMR) and under-five mortality rate (U5MR) are decreasing. The fertility and population growth rates are among the highest in the region, at 4.3 and 2.6 per 1,000 respectively. The maternal mortality rate (MMR) is high, at 160 per 100,000 live births (1990), although it is twice as high in several provinces. Enrolment in primary education is 92 per cent but retention within primary level is low, at 61 per cent. The coverage and quality of basic services are still insufficient. There continues to be inadequate management and shortages of qualified people at all levels. Challenges remain regarding the reduction of maternal mortality, universal access to water and sanitation, child labour and mistreatment of children.

6. Paraguay is undergoing a process of democratization, urbanization and economic integration within the Southern Cone Common Market (Mercado Comun del Sur. Although its economic growth is low, social expenditure has increased. Both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women have been ratified but have not yet been fully harmonized with national legislation, in particular the Children's Code. A national plan of action for children (NPA) has been adopted at national and departmental levels, although only eight of the country's 18 departments have started implementing it.

7. Achievements and constraints. Progress towards most decade goals is on target. For example, 74 per cent of salt for human consumption, mostly from imported sources, is now iodized, although sustainability is still fragile.

Recent reports on a possible decrease in vaccination coverage are disturbing. Child rights issues have become a common topic of work with the Government, civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Government is currently preparing its second report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, with the participation of NGOs and civil society. A new adoption law based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child was recently passed. UNICEF strongly supported the educational reform process, resulting in the adoption by the Ministry of Education of the child-centered, bilingual "active school" (escuela activa) model, which will be taken to scale using IDB funds. The programme goal in water and environmental sanitation has been achieved. UNICEF undertook assessments of working street children and sexual exploitation in Asuncion and Ciudad del Este and the International Labour Organisation started a national study on child labour.

8. Sustainability is a serious strategic issue, closely related to the need for change in programmatic emphasis. Issues of awareness, defense and enforcement of human rights are slowly moving up the national agenda. A common United Nations effort is being discussed in the areas of strategy formulation, management and dissemination and use of information. Results of Paraguay's recent entrance into the international fund-raising arena are still difficult to assess and the country has been hindered by the overall downward trend in development aid.

9. Assessment of programme strategies: lessons learned. With the exception of the education programme, the overall country programme strategy was focused on support to service delivery. A shift towards broader advocacy, partnerships, social mobilization focusing on issues of quality and "closing the gap" is needed to maximize impact and optimize the use of scarce resources.

10. More reliable information is a requirement for adequate policy definition and subsequent programming. Participatory monitoring and evaluation at all levels of society is necessary to obtain timely feedback for adequate reorientation of action. Greater support for effective decentralization, defined as local capacity-building and adequate transfer of resources, is indispensable.

11. Improved use of information, local-level partnerships and decentralization must all ensure the inclusion of women's and children's participation and the guarantee of their rights. The current programme orientation, focused on the supply of services by sector, must take into account needs and cultural preferences to change orientation to a more demand-based approach, as well as interlinkages between services.

12. Country programme management plan. Only 9 per cent of supplementary funds ($900,000 out of $10 million) have been raised, and the general resources allocation for Paraguay effectively has been reduced from $1.2 million to $850,000 per year. This calls for a serious consideration of funding efforts. Concrete supplementary funding commitments for 1998-1999 have been received from Canada, Spain and Sweden, but they are still well below 50 per cent of the total amounts approved by the Executive Board. Nevertheless, the recently completed integrated budget for 1998-1999 maintained the pattern of expenditures for administrative support, which are still cost-effective.

13. The Paraguay sub-office progressively has gained a high degree of autonomy from the Peru area office. The application of management excellence principles has helped the office to redesign work processes and management practices, with distribution of responsibilities adapted to a more cross-sectoral approach. The

creation of a country management team has improved communication and motivation among staff members. No major changes are foreseen in the office's structure and posts.

Guyana

14. In Guyana, the MTR was held in September 1997 and led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the participation of the Prime Minister. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Health and Education also participated, making conceptual and operational suggestions for the adjustment of the overall programme. In addition to UNICEF staff from the country, area and regional offices, participants included representatives of concerned ministries, regions and municipal councils, community groups, NGOs, the resident coordinator, heads of United Nations agencies, representatives of other bilateral and multilateral organizations and the press.

15. The situation of children and women. Between 1992 and 1996, Guyana's real economic growth averaged 2 per cent. Debt release totaled about $800 million, so that the servicing ratio on exports dropped from 75 per cent in 1991 to 48 per cent in 1996. Consequently, there have been significant increases in government allocations to the social sectors. During the same period, U5MR and MMR were halved, to 28 per 1,000 live births and 35 per 100,000 live births respectively. Low birth weight now accounts for only 15 per cent of births but is still above internationally accepted standards. Vaccination coverage remains high at more than 90 per cent, with no measles cases registered throughout the period. Primary education enrolment and participation rates are now increasing, to 102 per cent. However, there have been increases in reported child abuse, street children, child labour and violence against women in urban centres. The NPA, approved by Parliament in 1996, has provided an important mechanism for public advocacy, monitoring and policy coordination.

16. Achievements and constraints. The present Government is determined to create a child-friendly environment in Guyana as a basis for the planning and implementation of development programmes. Progress is commendable in the reduction of IMR and MMR, despite overall economic stagnation and the present slow recovery, particularly since 1992.

17. Basic data and social indicators need to be updated and mechanisms for collection, disaggregation, analysis and use should be improved. There is a need for increased use of social indicators as tools for policy decision-making, programme design and monitoring, and to identify gaps and pockets of priority needs to guide resource allocation.

18. Better inter-ministerial collaboration is required, as is the involvement of the Ministry of Finance in social development planning, to lead to better allocation of national resources. High staff turnover in relevant ministries continues to be a serious hindrance.

19. It is also necessary to increase capacity-building for sustainability and to establish mechanisms for programme monitoring and evaluation, both within and between government structures. UNICEF has supported the creation of several commissions for this purpose, including the National Commission for Women and Children and the National Commission for Early Childhood Care and Development. A Committee on Family Maintenance and Related matters has been created to review Guyana's law, within the context of Caribbean Community draft legislation and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

20. Assessment of programme strategies: lessons learned. Accelerated implementation of the present programme is possible given the positive national context. More attention should be paid to advocacy for policy development and to inclusion of community-level planning in programme efforts to strengthen the demand for services.

21. Areas for advocacy are the 20/20 Initiative, gender equity with a particular focus on the girl child and male socialization. More in-depth work is required on such issues related to family life as adolescent pregnancy, better parenting and early childhood education. A better understanding of programmes and policies to eradicate child labour will need to be developed. The re-mobilization of municipalities has great potential in strengthening community involvement and will need to be pursued.

22. Country programme management plan. Re-engineering of office structure and work processes to adapt to the new programme environment will emphasize investment in staff skills. Quarterly monitoring of implementation will be initiated.

MAJOR COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATIONS

23. Building on the comments of the Executive Board, the Americas and Caribbean region worked to improve evaluation practices and encourage organizational learning through dissemination of lessons learned and best practices. TACRO surveyed the monitoring and evaluation situation in the region to assess country offices' principal needs. The survey results served as the basis for organizing the regional workshop held in Santa Fé de Bogotá, where a strategic planning tool - the regional framework - was designed.

24. Workshop participants identified weak evaluation practices as a fundamental constraint to implementation both in their offices and with counterparts. Their strengthening would oblige management and staff to ensure clarity of programme vision, goals and the design of adequate activities to fulfil them. Another constraint detected was inadequate technical capacity. To remedy this, a regional electronic monitoring and evaluation network has been set up to exchange information and experience and to disseminate new methodologies, taking advantage of knowledge centres existing outside UNICEF. A monthly electronic bulletin on lessons and practices was initiated to disseminate findings, recommendations, lessons learned and best practices, giving country offices a real opportunity to learn from each other. Flexible teams were set up, with country offices' participation, to follow-up and implement such planned activities as the development of indicators for a rights-based approach to programming and the updating and effective use of the UNICEF global evaluation database. A regional training workshop for UNICEF staff and counterparts is being organized in 1998 by TACRO and the Evaluation, Policy and Planning Division.

Integrated Basic Services Programme (1992-1996), Nicaragua

25. An external evaluation of PROSERBI was financed by SIDA in February 1997. The resulting report was shared with communities and with national and municipal counterparts, who participated with the donor in the preparation of a new proposal for implementing PROSERBI activities for the period 1997-2001. Among the main findings of the evaluation, taken into account in the new PROSERBI design, was the need to move beyond service delivery in order to strengthen local capacity for the formulation and implementation of social interventions.

The municipal level was identified as the centre for coordinating all social agents active in a particular territory, including external assistance agencies, government and NGOs. This recommendation is already being implemented by PROSERBI with the promotion of comprehensive social development plans in the municipalities covered by the programme.

26. PROSERBI made effective use of lessons identified during the 1995 SIDA evaluation of the UNICEF-supported water and sanitation programme in Central America (presented to the Executive Board in 1997), which underlined the importance of standardized technologies. PROSERBI, in fact, standardized the locally manufactured pump Bomba de Mecate which resulted in enhanced quantity and quality of local production, better availability of spare parts and reduced delivery delays. Another lesson was the willingness of beneficiaries to pay despite the fact that Nicaraguan communities are very poor and have limited capacity to pay for and maintain their water facilities. PROSERBI successfully promoted savings and loan cooperatives to provide an important credit mechanism to finance water and sanitation facilities.

Children's Election in Mexico

27. In Latin America, ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and promulgation of related national laws have coincided with a general movement towards greater democratic involvement. Children as subjects of rights and protagonists can help consolidate and amplify democracies. Likewise, respect, protection and improvement of children's and adolescents' rights to participation are fundamental to the cultural transformation that is needed to apply the Convention fully. An important response to this need has been the development by UNICEF of such processes as children's opinion polls (in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica and Venezuela), children's parliaments (in Belize, Chile, Ecuador and Jamaica) and children's elections (in Colombia and Mexico). In particular, children's election processes, coinciding with national elections, have been used to promote children's and adolescents' involvement in the democratic process and to stimulate adults' responses to the "voice of children".

28. In July 1997, 3,709,704 children voted for their rights during the Mexican federal election, facilitated by an agreement signed between the Federal Electoral Institute and UNICEF. Children voted predominantly for the right to education. The right to live where air, water and land are not polluted, the demand for people to love and take care of them, the right to be healthy and eat appropriate food and the right to play, relax and meet with other children also received high scores.

29. To measure the outcome and impact of the children's election, a national opinion poll was carried out among children and adults, featuring children's attitudes to the application of their rights and children's and parents' opinions of the election and of child rights at large. The elections appeared to be well accepted by children who felt that they had the opportunity to express their opinions. Parents saw the election as a good learning exercise for their children. Children have acquired stronger awareness of the existence, meaning and value of their rights while they expect society to respect them and similar democratic exercises in the future. In particular, the strong wish for education will need serious follow-up at policy and programme level.

Andean subregional programme in Bolivia

30. PROANDES in Bolivia is a component of the Andean subregional programme that covers Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela. Its general objective is to promote basic services to improve survival, development and protection of children and rural women, thus reducing poverty. PROANDES has implemented two phases since 1988 and is entering the third one, for the period 1997-2002. The main financing agencies - the Spanish Committee for UNICEF and the Swedish Government through SIDA - in collaboration with UNICEF Bolivia, carried out an external impact evaluation of the first eight years of PROANDES in Bolivia. The recommendations and lessons learned were used to design the next phase.

31. Evaluators found that PROANDES had important outcomes and impact in the concerned areas. The empowerment of women and communities are probably among the most important achievements, fueled greatly by a strong drive for literacy and the establishment of credit facilities through municipal banks. Young child development (Wawa Wasi) and drinking water extended coverage greatly. The return and sustainability of investments in physical capital appeared to be higher when done together with those in human and social capital to counteract rapid technological change and inappropriate socio-economic organization at local level. The literacy project (Yuyay Jap'ina), a component of the project to strengthen rural women, was very successful in Potosi, involving 13,000 participants, 73 per cent of them women. It had a demonstrated effect on gender relationships, women's self-esteem, the socio-economic empowerment of women and families and the strengthening of municipal organizations. Such multiple impact has great potential and opens the ground for other activities. The water component was also very successful, achieving broader impact than other similar projects in the country, although the sanitation and hygiene education components were still ineffective.

32. The evaluation team recommended strengthening the integrated framework and the coordination of different projects in search of synergies which can be replicated nationally through public policies. The gender approach and empowerment activities could also be better used as an integration strategy. Evaluators recommended improving the monitoring system to include process and impact indicators. Finally, a social and anthropological investigation of cultural appropriateness of the services delivered was strongly recommended.

Programme and project evaluations supporting the Brazil mid-term review

33. Formalized evaluative methods as part of MTR processes in country offices improve reviews, strengthen evaluation practices and culture and disseminate lessons learned within the region. Between April and November 1997, UNICEF Brazil carried out 46 evaluations considered relevant to the MTR process, which took place during the latter part of the year. The projects evaluated were selected through a weighted combination of such criteria as innovative design for formulation of public policies, relevance of project strategies for programme areas and sub-offices, emerging priorities (e.g., child labour, AIDS), potential for intersectoral integration, a child rights framework, national and local impact and replicability and sustainability of results.

34. Lessons learned through this evaluative experience were fed into the MTR process. The country programme's objectives were reviewed in terms of relevance, appropriateness and effectiveness. The evaluation of intersectoral projects from a rights perspective has provided valuable insights into how to shift towards a broader, rights-based framework. A side effect has been the

strengthened relationships between UNICEF staff and government and other implementing partners, including NGOs. The involvement of independent consultants was seen as very positive for enhanced participation and capacity-building and as a valuable means of self-assessment.

35. Such projects as the Child Pastorate, Community Health Agents, Support Centres for Small Entrepreneurs, the Child Rights News Agency and the Abrinq Foundation for Children Rights were evaluated. One global lesson is that evaluation is fundamental both to building and strengthening collaboration and alliances with government and to consolidating and expanding projects which could go to scale in the form of public policies. Another interesting lesson is that a project, to be sustainable, has to establish partnerships and alliances with governmental and non-governmental institutions that can strengthen initiatives and offer financial support. UNICEF needs to help train leaders in advocacy, to define communication strategies as part of any project and to strengthen the capacity of local communities to participate actively in planning and implementation. UNICEF should ensure that its cooperation creates a sustainable basis to transform outputs into impact.

CONCLUSION

36. Asymmetries in planning cycles mean that during 1997, the Americas and Caribbean region, of its 24 country programmes, completed just two MTRs and made progress on a third one. The two completed MTRs were for countries with comparable socio-economic and development conditions. Some favourable traits are seen in both as a result of enhanced awareness of social priorities, of which UNICEF is a major advocate. In both cases, there is a trend to convert purely service-oriented cooperation into rights-based advocacy.

37. Evaluation practice, essentially on specific projects, has developed considerably, with heavy support from donors. This has led to important feedback on the nature of follow-up and emerging cooperation policies. A clear attempt to improve knowledge acquisition and use began during the year.

38. Fully realizing the importance of such developments, TACRO organized supporting activities leading to the inception of its own plan of action for programme monitoring, and for evaluation and dissemination of experiences. The region now is fully prepared to develop further evaluative activities and so strengthen programming, fund-raising and accountability.